

# National Geographic, other partners show Sierra's geotourism gold on new Web site

By Dixie Reid

[dreid@sacbee.com](mailto:dreid@sacbee.com)

Apr. 8, 2010

Since the Gold Rush, the world has come to [California](#) in search of treasures. Nowadays, the state's gold is to be found in unique places, extraordinary experiences.

The [treasure hunt](#) gets a bit easier today at [Yosemite National Park](#) with the unveiling the [Sierra Nevada Geotourism Map Guide](#), an interactive Web site ([www.sierranevadageotourism.org](http://www.sierranevadageotourism.org)) and print map.

Yosemite and its environs are the first of four Sierra regions to be featured on the site created by a partnership of the [National Geographic Society](#), the [Sierra Nevada Conservancy](#) and the [Sierra Business Council](#).

Despite the partnership's expert pedigree, the new site's travel tips are strictly by the people, for the people.

"What's unique is that all of the content is generated at the local level," says [Bob Kingman](#), a manager with the conservancy. "It comes from people who know these locations best and who wrote the descriptions and provided the photographs and videos."

The idea is that locals know about the top places to eat, the little art gallery that shouldn't be missed, the hiking trail with breath-taking views, the quaint but remote bed-and-breakfast that's dripping with charm.

"There are a lot of incredible things in the Sierra Nevada that are not well-known," says [Jim Dion](#), associate director of the [National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations](#). "Local people share what they think is so special with the people who come to visit this wondrous cultural landscape of the Sierra Nevada."

"The site indexes places of authenticity," he says. "A [McDonald's](#) is like any [McDonald's](#) anywhere and doesn't really enhance your experience. But if you walk into the Happy [Burger](#) in Mariposa, or the Butterfly Cafe, then you're going to have an authentic local experience. That's what people are looking for when they travel: to visit iconic places and maximize their experience."

Click around on the site's main map to find information-loaded icons that describe such sites as the foothills village of [Volcano](#), the crazy-looking Upside-Down House in Lee Vining, the [Circle H Guest Ranch](#) in the [Bridgeport Valley](#) (welcoming "greenhorns" since 1931) and the Westbrook Wine Farm, at 1,800 feet up in [Madera County](#).

The site is participant-driven. Contribute must-see or must-do tips, keep track of your own favorite places, peruse the main map for travel ideas and learn about volunteer opportunities and upcoming special events.

"It's a living, breathing and growing exchange between local people and visitors and the Sierra Nevada," Dion says.

National Geographic has also created "geotourism" sites for [California's](#) Redwood Coast, [Greater Yellowstone](#) and the Central Cascades of Oregon and [Washington](#). More are on the way.

The idea of geotourism, says Dion, is to sustain and enhance the character of a place: its heritage, culture, environment and aesthetics. The well-being of residents also is a consideration.

He hopes these Web sites will encourage people to get out and explore back roads.

"Since 1898, National Geographic has been celebrating destinations and inspiring people to visit them," he says.

[© Copyright The Sacramento Bee. All rights reserved.](#)